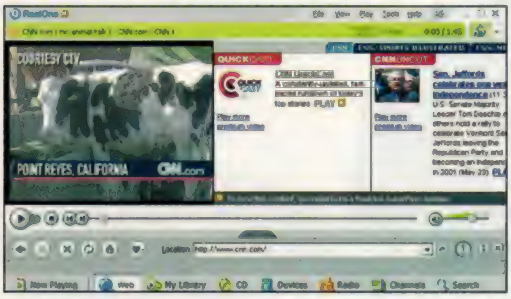
by Kevin Savetz

RealNetworks RealOne Player



RealOne Player
Free (SuperPass $9.95 per month)
RealNetworks
www.real.com

Along with a Web browser and email client, a Real media player is a staple in any Internet denizen's software trove. The latest incarnation, RealOne Player, has a new look and a gaggle of new features—but at a price.

RealOne Player combines functions of the older RealPlayer and RealJukebox. This newer app lets you tune in to online audio and video streams, encode MP3s, burn CDs, transfer music to a portable MP3 player, and browse the Web.

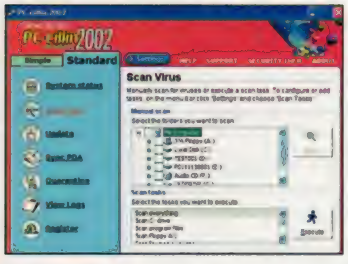
The program uses an elegant but cluttered three-pane interface. One pane shows the clip you're watching, another serves up information related to the clip, and a Web browser lets you surf for more. The versatile program supports more than 50 media types, including several streaming audio and video codecs.

The program is free—but not really. Previous Real Player editions came in two flavors: a free version and a pay-to-download "plus" version. Now there's just the RealOne Player version. It's a free download, but you need a RealOne membership for full functionality. Benefits include premium content and the full range of RealOne Player features. If you don't pay when the 14-day trial period ends, the program is severely crippled. Say goodbye to the graphic equalizer, full-screen video mode, crossfading, CD burning faster than 2X, MP3 encoding at better than 96Kbps, recording from analog sources, the ability to print jewel case inserts, and more. For nonsubscribers, RealOne is just a rudimentary media player.

Membership has its privileges, but those privileges cost $9.95 a month. For $120 a year, we'd rather put the money toward a basic cable subscription and a TV set from the Salvation Army.

If money is no object, RealOne is a great full-featured media player that gives you access to a ton of premium content. Otherwise, you can cobble together the same functionality using free software and shareware for less than $120 and have plenty left over for a real movie. ▲

Trend Micro PC-cillin 2002



PC-cillin 2002
$39.95 ($19.95 upgrade)
Trend Micro
www.antivirus.com

PC-cillin 2002 is Trend Micro's latest incarnation of antivirus software for home PCs. Like a flu shot, it's an annual obligation to keep you feeling well by keeping viruses at bay with file scanning, a personal firewall, and protection for your PDA.

The program's virus protection tools include manual file scanning, ongoing real-time scanning, and incoming email protection. Manual scanning is speedy and thorough, even when searching compressed files and hunting down macro viruses.

The product's software firewall also can protect your PC from Internet hackers. The interface makes an AOL installer seem tricky by comparison, but it sacrifices advanced configurability. A three-position Security Level slider is the only firewall option. The firewall blocks ports frequented by Back Orifice and common Trojans, but the list of blocked ports can't be modified.

The optional WebTrap feature filters out malicious Java and ActiveX code. The Site Filter is supposed to block access to offensive Web content, but it only blocks sites the user provides, essentially making it useless as a porn filter for children.

The email protection tool checks incoming mail for viruses and Trojan horses as mail is retrieved from the server. No special configuration is needed with Outlook, Outlook Express, Netscape, or Eudora. Other email clients require manual modifications. Scanning is limited to POP3 email accounts. IMAP accounts aren't supported, potentially giving viruses a wide-open door. The package also includes PC-cillin for Wireless, which includes virus protection for Palm-, Pocket PC-, and EPOC-powered PDAs.

Like many antivirus programs, PC-cillin includes one year of updates to protect you against the virus du jour. However, PC-cillin is itself a time bomb. The license agreement states you can only use the software for a year; it's a heavy-handed way to ensure upgrades ($20 annually) users on a budget won't appreciate. ▲

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect